

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAM #1007/01 1230515
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 030515Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4985
INFO RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 4161
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 1695
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 5500

S E C R E T AMMAN 001007

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2019
TAGS: PGOV PREL IS JO
SUBJECT: CODEL MCCONNELL'S APRIL 9 MEETINGS WITH JORDANIAN
MINISTERS

REF: A. AMMAN 1006
1B. AMMAN 706

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Natalie E. Brown
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: CODEL McConnell met April 9 with Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) Suhair Al-Ali jointly. Ali expressed her hope that the Senators would help Jordan obtain supplemental economic support. The Foreign Minister stressed the importance of securing a regional peace in the Middle East, affirmed Jordan's opposition to a nuclear-armed Iran, and expressed some optimism regarding prospects for dialogue with Syria. Separately, former U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao paid a courtesy call on Minister of Labor Ghazi Shbeikat, who said that Jordan would support labor reform even as it combats the effects of the global economic downturn. End Summary.

Delegation and Meetings

12. (SBU) Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) led a congressional delegation to Jordan from April 8-11, which included Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), and Senator James Risch (R-ID). In addition to the meetings with Judeh, Ali, and Shbeikat, delegation members were received by King Abdullah, as reported in Ref A.

Jordan Values Relationship with U.S.

13. (C) Judeh emphasized that Jordan values its strategic relationship with the U.S., highlighting the countries' shared vision, common objectives, and long history of close relations. Ali echoed the FM's praise and thanked the Senators for past U.S. financial support. She spoke appreciatively of the non-binding U.S.-Jordanian memorandum of understanding signed in September 2008 that laid out assistance levels for 2010-2014 at \$360 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) and \$300 million in Foreign Military Financing. The global economic downturn had exacerbated Jordan's precarious economic situation through rising deficits, declining exports, reduced remittances from Jordanians working abroad, Ali asserted. As a result, Jordan requested \$300 million in supplemental ESF in FY09, said Ali, who expressed her hope that the Senators could help secure the additional assistance.

14. (C) Asked by Senator Chambliss how the U.S. could assist Jordan economically, particularly its private sector, Ali emphasized the King and the government's commitment to private sector development and a desire to attract small to medium-sized investors to the country. She said Jordan would benefit, for example, from additional bilateral engagement in

science and technology.

FM Seeking Comprehensive Peace

¶ 5. (C) FM Judeh described his top priorities as a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace that would secure a safe future for the entire region. By realizing the Arab Peace Initiative and solving the core issue that affects the region, Israel would have peace with 57 Arab and Muslim countries, Judeh said. This, in turn, would curb radicalism in the Middle East and allow the region to develop economically.

¶ 6. (C) Echoing the King's comments earlier in the day, the FM expressed concern that time was not on the side of those seeking a settlement. People in the region were suffering from "peace process fatigue-to them the phrase has almost become synonymous with diversion, delay, and protraction." Judeh said the international community should guide the Palestinians and Israelis in a framework that allows negotiations to progress. On the Palestinian side, the first goal should be the formulation of a consensus Palestinian government that is empowered to negotiate.

¶ 7. (S/NF) Asked by Senator Barrasso how Jordan plans to pursue peace with a new Israeli Government, the FM told the Senators he believes Netanyahu is aware of the need to reach a solution. Jordanian officials had refrained from responding to the rhetoric of unnamed Israeli officials as a war of words would be unproductive. The Jordanian government preferred instead to wait for the Israelis to articulate their policy on peace negotiations, Judeh said.

Deal with Iran through Progress on Peace

¶ 8. (S/NF) Shifting the discussion to Iran, Senator Barrasso offered that Netanyahu appeared to be prioritizing dealing with Iran first before addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict. The FM responded that the two issues could be dealt with simultaneously. Since Iranian involvement in the region often came in the guise of solidarity with the Palestinians, a comprehensive peace would deprive Iran of its key pretext for interference, Judeh asserted.

¶ 9. (C) Jordan and the U.S. shared the assessment that Iranian nuclear threats were unacceptable, Judeh noted. While Jordan was seeking peaceful nuclear power to meet its energy needs under international oversight, Iran needs to set the record straight.

Syria Ready for Engagement

¶ 10. (C) Responding to a question on engaging Syria, Judeh acknowledged Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad's recent visit to Amman, noting recent U.S. engagement with Damascus as well. He read the Syrian FM's recent statement that Syria stood ready to negotiate with the new Israeli government as proof that Syria wanted to be part of the international community. He reiterated, however, his position that Jordan preferred a comprehensive regional settlement, rather than progress on a bilateral track.

MOL says Jordan Committed to Ongoing Reform

¶ 11. (C) In a separate meeting, former Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao paid an April 9 courtesy call on Minister of Labor Ghazi Shbeikat, who confirmed that the Jordanian government would continue with labor reforms, particularly an amendment to the labor law to allow foreign workers to join Jordanian unions (Ref B). The draft amendment requires foreign workers to be in Jordan for at least five years to be eligible to join a union and enables unions to devise internal regulations regarding a foreign worker's ability to run for office, according to Shbeikat. Regarding the impact

of the Free Trade Agreement and Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) on Jordan, Shbeikat commented that the global downturn had negatively affected the garment sector, which provides the majority of Jordan's exports to the U.S., causing Jordanians to lose jobs. To help the apparel sector through this difficult period, the Jordanian government approved a subsidy package that would provide garment factories a waiver for one foreign worker permit fee for every Jordanian currently employed, as well as a waiver for two work permit fees if the factory hires a new Jordanian employee, the Minister said.

¶12. (SBU) National Security Advisor to Senator McConnell, Tom Hawkins, participated in the meeting with Judeh and Ali, as did the Ambassador and an Embassy notetaker. Legislative Assistant to Senator McConnell, Roy Brownell, and Econoff accompanied Secretary Chao to her courtesy call with Shbeikat.

¶13. (U) CODEL McConnell cleared this message.

Visit Embassy Amman's Website
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/>
Beecroft